

TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FICTION

On 25 October 2021 I received a harrowing message from someone called Rachel in response to my having posted photos that very day on Instagram disclosing the real identities of some of the characters in The Burlington Files espionage series. What Rachel saw was this:



“Mark Burlington aka John Van de Weg (a cousin of Bill Fairclough) who was a character in Beyond Enkription, the first autobiographical spy novel in The Burlington Files series by Bill Fairclough.”

Rachel’s comment read: “Really???! Wow! That’s my late father.”

My immediate reaction was to thank heaven that her message didn’t refer to any of the photos published of my past liaisons such as Suzie Laurent, Jasmine (Jazz) Moreau or Vivienne Templeton in 1974. After all, given I was a bit of a Don Juan in the seventies, she could have claimed one of them was her long lost mother as a prelude to taking out a maternity suit. Thinking of that was enough to get me to call my lawyers ... until I remembered their charge-out rates for collect calls.

Anyway, all’s well that ends well. It turned out Rachel was correctly referring to her late father John Van de Weg, aka Commander Mark Burlington in the book. John was a cousin of mine who worked in law enforcement in Bermuda in the seventies.

As depicted in Chapter 37 of Beyond Enkription on Saturday 21 December 1974 at Bermuda International Airport in Hamilton, a quite incredible incident occurred concerning a Pam Am flight destined for London’s Heathrow Airport. If you’ve read the book you won’t have forgotten it and if you haven’t read it you should because there are going to be no spoilers here. The incident involved my cousin John, myself and Vivienne Templeton, in real life a CIA operative based in Fort Lauderdale.

Indeed, it was such an incredulous incident that it had become the only hotly contested scene in the book. Those I knew of who had links with Bermudan law enforcement officials and attorneys, have hazarded it may have been a highly elaborate practical joke. Others have even looked for more esoteric explanations linked to fables from the Bermudan Triangle.

Contrary to libellous gossip, I can confirm it had nothing to do with another event in which some partners in a magic circle law firm allegedly mislaid their luggage in Bermuda and then lost their cases ... against me. Furthermore, it was Mark Twain not my cousin John who first dreamt up the quotation "You can go to heaven if you want. I'd rather stay in Bermuda."

Readers and critics alike have repeatedly questioned the incident's authenticity on all sorts of grounds. Were there flights direct or otherwise to Heathrow from Nassau and/or Miami via Hamilton in those days or even on that day? Why did the incident happen in the first place? Did it actually happen on that Saturday and if not when? Who could have authorised what happened and under what international treaty? Was the incident only possible because the Bermudan Rectangle split one of its sides with laughter?

Well, Rachel has now unwittingly answered all these doubters whether travel connoisseurs, legal beagles, conspiracy theorists or whatever. How? She has confirmed that this incident was one of her father's favourite anecdotes. She along with her father's family and friends in Bermuda had heard John's condensed version of the "incident" countless times. According to Rachel, her father's version of events broadly tallied with and certainly did not contradict how I described what happened in Beyond Enkription. What is more, her father wasn't aware he featured in the book as he had never read it.

For readers, especially lawyers, who still question the veracity of this incident, interviews with all of Rachel's family and friends who heard her father repeat his favourite anecdote can be arranged at your firm's expense in the Empathy Suite, Palms Casino Resort, Las Vegas ... when or if it reopens. Alternatively, another luxury hotel with a commensurate price tag can be booked at your firm's expense.

As said, to avoid spoilers I can release no more information about this incident involving that fated Pan Am flight to London via Bermuda. Needless to say, once you have read the book you too may have questions but at least you will know that what transpired that day in Hamilton actually took place and has broadly speaking been independently corroborated. Nevertheless, precisely why and how John Van de Weg organised events that day may well forever remain an official secret as no one has ever properly explained them to me. Rest assured I won't be flying Pan Am again ... notwithstanding they ceased operations on 4 December 1991.

In 1833 Lord Byron wrote in Canto X1V of his epic poem Don Juan, "truth is always strange; stranger than fiction". Others such as Mark Twain, G. K. Chesterton, Edward Bellamy, Humphrey Bogart, Leo Rosten and Tom Clancy have since used similar expressions. Not one of them was wrong, and, as Winston Churchill infamously wrote about the truth: "lawyers occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened".

This article was written by Bill Fairclough and first published on 23 November 2021.